

BX
5133
D704s

DONALDSON

A SERMON PREACHED
IN ST. JAMES'S CHURCH

A
A
0
0
0
7
0
2
5
8
8
5



UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

J. D. Jones

A SERMON

PREACHED IN

ST. JAMES'S CHURCH, BURY ST. EDMUNDS,

On Tuesday, the 10th of December, 1850,

IN AID OF THE FUNDS

FOR THE REPAIR OF THE ORGAN.

BY

JOHN WILLIAM DONALDSON, D.D.

HEAD MASTER OF BURY SCHOOL:

FORMERLY FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, ETC. ETC. ETC.

PRINTED BY REQUEST.

BURY ST. EDMUND'S: G. THOMPSON.

LONDON: JOHN W. PARKER, WEST STRAND.

M D C C C L.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

TO

EX
5133
B7045

THE HONOURABLE AND REVEREND

EDWARD PELLEW, M.A.

PERPETUAL CURATE OF ST. JAMES'S CHURCH.

MY DEAR MR. PELLEW,

I have received so many applications to print this Sermon, which was preached at your request, that I have consented to do so. In the hope that the sale may add something to the fund which you have raised for the restoration of the organ, the Publisher concurs with me in placing the results at your disposal; and I am glad to have this opportunity of expressing my respect and regard for you.

In the bonds of that unaffected Christianity, which you enforce in your ministrations and exemplify in your life,

I remain, my dear Mr. PELLEW,

Your sincere friend and grateful parishioner,

J. W. DONALDSON.

SCHOOL HALL,

12th December, 1850.

1922549

S E R M O N,

ETC.

PSALM CL. 3—5: *'Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp: praise him with the timbrel and pipe: praise him with stringed instruments and organs: praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.'*

AS the 148th Psalm had called upon all created nature to sing the praises of the great Jehovah, so in this short canticle, which concludes our collection of the ancient Hebrew hymns, the sacred poet invokes the aid of all the musical instruments at that time used in divine worship. Scarcely anything seems to have been omitted which could render the band harmonious and effective; from the martial notes of the great trumpet, to the humble accompaniment of the little castanet, which seems to be designated as a second kind of *tzlatzal*, or cymbal, the whole repertory is ransacked in order to give additional force to the devout strains of religious melody. To us the passage is interesting, because it shows us that we have a sufficient precedent for the instrumental music which we have introduced into our churches; it shows us that while the words of our service, of prayer and thanksgiving, are supplied by the prophetic muse of the Jewish sanctuary, we have introduced no incongruous elements in the varied notes of the organ, which rolls its majestic volume of sound through the stately aisles of our cathedrals.

There can be no doubt that the instrumental accompani-

ment of religious music may be traced back to the very beginnings of history. Not only among the Jews, but among heathen nations, we know that wherever a company of worshippers met together, there the resources of art were called in, to give greater force to the musical sounds with which they poured forth their feelings of hope or thanksgiving. We see in the sculptured monuments of ancient Egypt every variety of instrumentation in connexion with the worship of their temples. The harp, the lyre, the guitar, the flute, the trumpet, the drum, the tambourine, the cymbal, and the castanet, are constantly seen among the groups of devotees. The same was the case with the ancient Assyrians; and every classical scholar knows that, among the Greeks, the worshippers of the gods

“ ——— might hear and learn the secret power
Of harmony, in tones and numbers, hit
By voice or hand, and various measured verse,
Æolian charms and Dorian lyric odes.”

Nor was this universal adoption of instrumental music as an accompaniment of religious rites without a good and valid reason. Although the sweetness and harmony of the human voice is the best and noblest expression of the feelings of man, it must not be forgotten that it is not always easy to get a band of trained singers to give grace to the outpourings of religious sentiment. The musical instrument is not only more generally attainable, but it is also more uniformly efficacious. Of course, it is best to combine both the voice and the instrument. But as we may always count upon the latter whenever we have only one instructed musician; whereas the increase of vocal music, when there is no taste or skill, is only an increase of ludicrous or offensive discord; it is not surprising that, in all ages, the religious feelings of

the worshipper should take refuge in the fixed and regulated notes of the mechanical diapason.

But we cannot acquiesce in the propriety of this result without some previous inquiry into the necessity or suitability of music in general, as a part of public worship. It might seem sufficient to say at once, that we feel that it is so, and that this has been the universal impression wherever civilized or barbarous men have united in prayer or thanksgiving. If, however, we must seek for a rational explanation of the fact, we should say, that while, on the one hand, music is the most tranquillizing and gratifying form of utterance,—for ‘man,’ as a great philosopher has said, ‘is a creature of song;’—on the other hand, it is most in accordance with our best conceptions of the nature of God, that our worship of Him should assume the forms of harmony and order. The marks of arrangement and design, which are conspicuous in the works of creation, have ever been regarded as the surest proof of his creative energy, and of his continually watchful providence; indeed, an apostle has told us, that God, though far removed from human eyes, reveals himself to our minds in those works which we touch and handle every day: ‘for the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, (Rom. i. 20.)’ It was well, then, that the Greeks called the universe a *kosmos*, a word which denotes the highest degree of order and symmetry; and so entirely did they recognise the divine discipline and government which reign in this lower world, that they could not refuse a sort of mystical homage even to those principles of numbers, by which the properties of musical harmony and geometrical proportion were regulated and explained. By a transition, which cannot be deemed forced

or unnatural, though perhaps there is some little confusion in the ideas which it involves, the elements of this wonderful system of nature were supposed to constitute a sort of musical chorus, which for ever hymned the praises of the great Creator. Such a mode of speaking is found even in the sacred songs of the king and prophet David. For example, we cannot interpret in any other way the commencement of Psalm xix.—‘The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, but, without these, their voice is heard. Their lesson has gone forth into all lands, and their eloquence unto the end of the world.’ This notion of the universal prevalence of a spirit of harmony has found an echo in the words of our greatest English poet: ‘Look,’ he says,

‘how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patins of bright gold!
There’s not the smallest orb that thou beholdest
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubim;
Such harmony is in immortal souls.
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close us in, we cannot hear it.’

But it is not only on account of its supposed or real appropriateness to the object of our devotion, that artificial music is so universally adopted as a vehicle of divine worship. As I have already said, it is the most tranquillizing and gratifying form of utterance, and, as such, recommends itself inevitably to the feelings of the worshippers themselves. One of our most eminent divines has expressed himself in the following terms, respecting the influence of religious music (Hooker, *Eecl. Pol.* v., c. 38): ‘Touching musical harmony, whether by instrument or by voice, it being but of high

and low in sounds, a due proportionable disposition; such, notwithstanding, is the force thereof, and so pleasing effects it hath in that very part of man which is most divine, that some have been thereby induced to think that the soul itself by nature is or hath in it harmony. . . . In harmony the very image and character even of virtue and vice is perceived, the mind delighted by their resemblances, and brought, by having them often iterated, into a love of the things themselves. For which cause there is nothing more contagious and pestilent than some kinds of harmony; than some, nothing more strong and potent to good: . . . so that, although we lay altogether aside the consideration of ditty, or matter, the very harmony of sounds being framed in due sort, and carried from the ear to the spiritual faculties of our souls, is by a native puissance and efficacy greatly available to bring to a perfect temper whatsoever is there troubled, apt as well to quicken the spirits as to allay that which is too eager, sovereign against melancholy and despair, forcible to draw forth tears of devotion, if the mind be such as can yield them, able both to move and to moderate all affections.'

There are few, perhaps, who will dissent from the spirit and general truth of the sentiments thus expressed in quaint but solemn eloquence by Richard Hooker; but in our time, as in his, there have been differences of opinion as to the sort of music which it is proper or expedient to use in the public worship of God. For while we find, in the one extreme, that many of the protestant dissenters utterly repudiate the employment of instrumental accompaniments, and in this, as in other parts of the service, reject every approach to the elegances of art; and while, in the other extreme, the Romish church delights in sensuous and theatrical displays of the finest melody, and sometimes even mingles with the swell of the

organ and the trained counterpoint of the choristers, some well-known voices, which have earned applause and gained popularity on a profaner stage—the Church of England itself, which stands between these extremes, is not united in a consistency of sentiment on this subject; and there are still some of its ministers, and many of its members, who either object altogether to the chaunting of the service in the cathedrals, or, at any rate, would regard with great jealousy any attempt to import this extended employment of sacred music into the ordinary routine of the parish churches. On the other hand, there are many among ourselves who complain of an increase in our use of metrical psalmody, who think that hymns, not derived from the authorized version of the Psalms, and introduced, without reference to any Rubric, at the beginning or end of the service, savour more of the meeting-house than of the Church; and who maintain that while these compositions often suggest objectionable doctrine, their modern and slipshod style harmonizes very ill with the solemn and dignified march of our time-honoured liturgy. The true method of reconciling these discordant sentiments, by pointing out their common truth and their distinctive errors, must be sought in a rational consideration of religious worship in general. And so large an amount of practical error is engendered by vague and inaccurate notions on this subject, that it is quite worth while, on some occasions, to substitute for religious exhortations an explanation of that wherein religion itself consists.

Now, our first reflection must convince us that religion does not consist in acts of worship, whether public or private. Such acts are indications of the existence of a religious feeling, and they contribute to fan the flame of devotion, which otherwise might smoulder away until it was extinguished.

But religion is that which leads to prayer, and to many other outward manifestations. In itself it is something higher and better than all worship. It is the habitual subjugation of the soul to the law of God—it is that true subjection of the heart and life to a heavenly rule of government, which shows itself in a constant abnegation of self, and an uniform cultivation of the spirit of love and obedience. The fulfilment of all the law and the prophets hangs upon this. Love is the fulfilling of the law: to love God above all things, and our neighbours as ourselves. This is the substance of the revelations of Sinai, this is the sum of the injunctions of Jesus. Even to Balaam, the half-illuminated seer, this great fact was not unknown. ‘O my people, (says the prophet Micah, vi. 5, seqq.) remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal: that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord. Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love merey, and to walk humbly with thy God?’ These sentiments find their echo in every word of the gospels, and in all the most express declarations of the Apostles. Not votive rites, not sumptuous offerings, not long prayers, but purity and benevolence are constantly set before us as the expected manifestations of our faith. We are told that Jesus Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a pe-

culiar people, zealous of good works ; and we are reminded, that while that man's religion is vain who, deceiving his heart, contents himself with loud professions of party-zeal, the only religion, which is pure and undefiled before God and the Father, is the faith of those who visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and who keep themselves unspotted from the world (James i. 26, 27.) Such being the case, it is manifest, as I have already said, that religion does not consist in religious worship. But, on the other hand, there cannot be, in our present condition, any religion without worship. It is an absurdity to suppose that in this particular alone we can get rid of the conditions of our being. Made up as we are of soul and body, of mental thoughts and sensible impressions, we cannot hope to satisfy the religious impulse by a merely contemplative devotion. It is necessary in this, as in other things, that the thought should complete itself in the expression ; and as we could not well reason, if we had not the faculty of speech, so neither could we be truly devout if we did not in some way give an outward and tangible reality to our religious feelings, by prayers and services, which act upon the sentiments which they represent, which cherish as well as gratify the instinctive cravings of our spiritual faith. The only question, then, which can arise on the subject of rites and ordinances is one of degree. It is simply this. To what extent can we safely carry the outward representation of our religious feelings? What is the true limit between a cold and dead ritual, which dissatisfies, if it does not disgust, the man of taste and education ; and the excess of symbolical observances, which lead us imperceptibly into idolatry—into a substitution of the sign for the thing signified? Now, it is clear that this must be a standard of measurement which

varies with the age and country. Ecclesiastical architecture, sacerdotal vestments, and church music, are the adjuncts, not the constituents, of our faith; and an attempt to revive what is obsolete may be as absurd, unnecessary, and perhaps mischievous, as it may be, on the other hand, offensive and prejudicial to discontinue that which is harmless in itself, and connected with the cherished associations of sincere and guileless worshippers. The Church of England has always aimed at the true mean in these matters—neither abolishing, nor retaining, nor reviving, without some reason which the spirit of the age, and the feelings of the congregation, have pronounced to be valid. In opposition to our golden mean, we need not go far to discover the opposite extremes of error. For, on the one hand, we see in the theatrical displays of the Romish mass, which some among ourselves have unfortunately attempted to imitate, a supersensuous love of symbols, which is so nearly related to idolatry, that none but a casuist could discover the difference; and, on the other hand, we find among some of the Protestant dissenters an abolition of all the decent ceremonies of public worship, merely to mark a distinction between themselves and the episcopal communions. To say nothing of other peculiarities, wherein consists the wisdom of standing to pray and sitting to sing, merely because the older Church, following a natural instinct, thought that kneeling was the proper attitude for prayer, and that an upright posture was most suitable for the public praises of the King of kings? Among the preposterous innovations which took place in consequence of this perverse opposition to old practices, merely because they were old, may be mentioned the attempt to extrude the organ from every place of worship. Indeed, this instrument was regarded, by all the more violent

and enthusiastic advocates of Protestantism in this country, as one of the vilest remnants of Popery; under the contemptuous name of 'piping,' the practice of playing on the organ was condemned as no less proper to 'popish dens,' as they called the cathedrals, than surplice and cope-wearing; and when the principles of the puritans were dominant, at the time of the great civil war, the same hands which defaced our church architecture were not less destructive in their attacks upon all the organs in the kingdom. And to such an extent was the demolition carried, that at the Restoration scarcely an instrument of the kind was to be found in England, and we were obliged to import from the continent both organs and persons to play upon them. Since then the feeling against instrumental music in places of worship has gradually given way; and though some communities of nonconformists, like the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, consistently resist the introduction of the organ, there are many meeting-houses which do not fall short of the Church in the elaborate accompaniments of their psalmody.

It is not necessary that I should occupy your time with a history of the Church-use of the organ. It is sufficient to say that it was universally adopted as early as the tenth century, and that almost uninterrupted experience has approved its suitability for the sacred employment to which it has been so long applied. For compass, variety, and dignity of tone, it excels all instruments, or combinations of instruments; and it is inseparably connected with our recollections of those noble compositions of Handel, which give a poetical exaltation to our religious sentiments, even in these days of mechanical routine. But although I may assume that most of those who hear me are persuaded that the organ is a most

important adjunct to a large parish church, it is not the less incumbent upon me to support by arguments the claims which I am this day called upon to advocate. And I trust to be able to show that there are more than ordinary reasons why the wealthy and liberal persons who abound in this ancient town and in the neighbourhood should lend a helping hand towards defraying the expenses of those repairs which have restored St. James's organ to more than its original power and efficiency.

I must begin by reminding you of the peculiarly representative position of the two old parish churches in this town. They are all that remain of the ecclesiastical splendour of which Bury was once the centre; and, though they are but fragments, their architectural proportions far exceed the beggarly endowment by which they are supported. In the days of the Abbey, this place was not only the spiritual metropolis of the whole district, but the same foundation which opened its doors to the poor and weary, and dispensed its alms to citizens and foreigners alike, claimed either feudal superiority or an actual right of property over the fairest domains in the neighbourhood. In his rights, no less than in his duties, the lord abbot of St. Edmundsbury refused to be circumscribed by the limits of a municipality; and while he gathered in his rents from far and wide, he made provision for an equally large supply to the spiritual and bodily wants of the country. Among the arrangements which I would refer to this frank acknowledgment of extended responsibility, I do not hesitate to include the erection of the two parish churches, which once stood as adjuncts to the great Abbey Minster, and which, in their more modern form, still represent the spiritual activity of the great monastic establishment. For the monks themselves,

and for the royal and noble guests who were entertained within the walls, when parliament was held here, or when other circumstances brought sovereignty to be the guest of religion—for all who were received within the cloistered precincts, the Abbey Minster sufficed as a place of worship. But the town without required religious instruction at the hands of the monks; and for the town were erected the prototypes of these two stately churches, opening upon the wall, and forming, as it were, a sort of double nave to the great fabric of the Abbey. If we might hazard such a conjecture, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that while St. Mary's Church, which was subsequently erected, was intended for more general purposes, the original representative of the edifice in which we are assembled, which bears the name of St. James, the supposed patron of palmers and pilgrims, and which stands close by the entrance gate leading to the west end of the Abbey church, was especially designed for the religious worship of those numerous votaries who flocked from all parts of the kingdom to pay their homage at the wonder-working shrine of St. Edmund. It was therefore, emphatically, the 'Strangers' Church; and this circumstance may, perhaps, give it an additional interest in the eyes of those who can recognise the weight of historical associations. But the claims of St. James's Church to be considered by others than its own parishioners, do not rest upon any conclusions respecting its original design and employment. For a very long period during its protestant history, it was actually used as the church of this neighbourhood. Here, on the market-day, when the people thronged to the assize town of Suffolk for business or pleasure, a preacher was provided to remind them that they were fellow-citizens of a heavenly kingdom. If the Wednesday lecture has been dis-

continued here, it has not been by any fault of ours, and we should be glad to see a return to a practice which constituted this church a spiritual diversorium for the whole district. There is, however, another circumstance connected with this church, which has been one of its distinguishing characteristics since the time when the present edifice was first opened for public worship. The same pious king, to whom we ascribe the erection of the present walls of St. James's Church, also founded the school which bears his name, and which has always sent its scholars to form a part, and no unimportant or uninteresting part, of the Sunday congregation at St. James's Church. As there is not a family of any note in the whole county of Suffolk which has not, at some time during the last three hundred years, had its representatives among the scholars of King Edward's School, I cannot doubt that the clergy and gentry of the neighbourhood will consider this a special reason why they should take an active part in the efforts which we are making to secure a dignified and becoming performance of church worship for an edifice which is thus destined for academic as well as for parochial purposes. If we were to take even the lowest view of the uses and effects of our public ministrations, we might at least say that they contribute very materially to the spiritual and moral education of the poor, and that, even on this account, no adjunct to public worship can be called of trivial importance, when it helps to form the taste, to refine the feelings, and to give a softened tone to the ruder emotions of those who have no other means of bringing themselves into actual contact with the beautiful. But if this is true in all churches, it is still more true in the case of a sacred building, which is applied to purposes strictly collegiate, and which, from week to week, gives the highest and

most solemn instruction to those whose parents have enabled them to avail themselves of the most elaborate form of education provided for the inhabitants of this town and district. I need not remind many of you of the renewed associations suggested by this edifice, nor of the eloquent and affectionate address which was delivered from this pulpit, on a recent occasion which drew to St. James's Church a congregation supplied by many parishes and many counties; and I am sure that not a few, whose names are unknown in our vestry list, entered these stately aisles with a feeling that they had returned to the hearth of their spiritual home, and that the old church, like the old school, had a perpetual claim upon their grateful recollection; *you*, too, my brother parishioners, must have been impressed with the thought that the pilgrim's staff and shell, which still adorn our western portals, had not entirely lost their significance; and that the strangers whom we had admitted to a share in our parochial worship and all its privileges of communion, might be expected to revisit us from time to time, and leave a blessing behind them.

For these special reasons, and generally because all Christians are interested in whatever concerns the honour and worship of God, I venture to hope that those who are here to-day will, of their bounty, contribute to the fund which we have raised among ourselves for the repair of our old and valuable organ. I make this appeal with confidence, because I have lived in this district long enough to know that the prompt liberality of those who have their abode in West Suffolk is never wanting when a worthy object is proposed for its exercise. Persuaded of this, I have not indulged in any eagerness of entreaty; I have satisfied myself with a plain and unpretending statement of the facts of the case, and of the circumstances which give a peculiar value

and interest to all that is done in this church, feeling perfectly convinced that the same generosity which founded and endowed an hospital, and which repaired the falling roof of St. Mary's, and the tottering tower close at hand, will not be wanting in donations for the due performance of the worship of God in a church which has so many claims on the best sympathies of those who live in the vicinity.

But while I am urging you, my Christian brethren, to help us in providing the harmony of sounds for the songs of praise which we utter here, let me not forget that there is a higher harmony—not appreciable by the ear of man, but cognisable by the omniscience of God—without which all worship, whether said or sung, is worthless. If I had overlooked this, I should have been reminded of it by the beautiful anthem which immediately preceded this sermon.* I

* The following beautifully simple anthem, written, I believe, by the Bishop of Norwich, had been sung before the sermon:—

'COME hither—angel tongues invite—
Come hither, and behold the sight:
A bridal city, built in heaven,
And bright with glory God has given.

'O holy messenger, in vain
My wistful eye to heaven I strain;
I see no city in mid-air,
No bridal vision, strange and fair.

'Come hither, still the angel cried;
See mingling thousands side by side,
Kneeling and worshipping together,
Each calling each beloved brother.

'Is this thy bridal city, Lord?
So let me understand thy word;
So cleanse my soul of all its sin,
That I may go and dwell therein!

mean, of course, the harmony or unison of heart and mind, which is the antecedent condition of all acceptable prayer. It is this which constitutes the true Church, of which Christ is the head, which is animated by his spirit, and the members of which are bound together by a true, but invisible incorporation with him. It is not the number of the worshippers, but their harmony, which makes their prayers and praises ascend with acceptance to the throne of grace; for Jesus has said: ‘If *two* of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where *two* or *three* are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.’ (Matth. xviii. 19, 20.) Indeed, a perfect agreement in a petition, even by two persons, pre-supposes that renouncement of individual selfishness which can alone prompt a petition agreeable to God. We can hardly imagine that two Christians should so agree, except in the feeling of a want for that spiritual grace which they desire for one another no less than for themselves, and which will never be denied to those who ask for it. Be the congregation great or small, it is this secret harmony and unison which constitute its beauty and its strength. What was said of her prototype, the bride, may be said of the Church herself: ‘The king’s daughter is glorious *within*.’ (Ps. xlv. 13.) Yes, ‘her clothing of bright gold’ is neither more nor less than that wedding-garment of righteousness which consists of faith working through love. But there is in this harmony an outward beauty also. ‘Behold,’ says the Psalmist, (cxxxiii.) ‘how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity: it is as the dew of Hermon and as the dew that descended on the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.’

No costly architecture, no melodious organ peals, no sweet concert of voices, will make our orisons of any worth, unless we 'walk worthy of our vocation, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.' (Eph. iv. 1—3.)

LONDON:
SAVILL & EDWARDS, PRINTERS, 4, CHANDOS STREET,
COVENT GARDEN.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



AA 000 702 588 5

77hi



